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## JOHN WARREN

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JOHN WARREN, surgeon of the Revolution, organizer, orator, practitioner of Boston until after the War of 1812, is to be credited with founding the Harvard Medical School, where he lectured in surgery for over 30 years. He was one of the chief founders and for 11 years was president of the Massachusetts Medical Society. He was one of the first to do an amputation at the shoulder joint, not to mention being an advocate of healing by first intention, in the days when the presence of "laudable pus" was thought to be a part of the normal process of repair in all wounds.

Of medium stature, well formed and of a military bearing, he had a most prepossessing appearance. Peale's portrait shows him with a high forehead surmounted by bushy hair, dark eyes, an aquiline nose, and an expression indicative of a genial nature which had not been hardened by the stern requirements of surgery in the pre-anæsthetic era.

Dr. Warren's father, Joseph Warren, was a farmer of Roxbury, now a part of Boston, a descendant of John Warren who came fellow passenger with Governor Winthrop in the *Arabella*, arriving in Salem on June 12, 1630. His mother, Mary Warren, was a daughter of Dr. Samuel Stevens, also of Roxbury. The father was killed by a fall from an apple tree in 1755 when John was 2 years old, for he was born on July 27, 1753. His brother Joseph and he were more or less dependent on their own exertions for their education. John, after taking his A.B. at Harvard in 1771, studied medicine in Boston for 2 years according to the custom of the time, with his brother Joseph, who was 12 years his senior, and then settled in practice in Salem where there was a less crowded field than in the capital. In college Warren, though not a deep student, became a good classical scholar and developed a love of anatomy, helping to form a club for the study of that subject, which at that time was given little attention.

Though absorbed in an active practice he was said to have taken part in the "Tea Party" in Boston Harbor, December 18, 1773. He joined Colonel Pickering's Salem regiment of militia as a private. Toward the close of the battle of Lexington, April 19, 1775, he arrived at Winter Hill, Somerville, with his regiment, but not in time to be in the engagement. After the battle of Bunker Hill, 2 months later, he left Salem at 2 o'clock in the morning in an attempt to learn

the accuracy of the rumor that his brother Joseph had been killed. While searching, he received a thrust from the bayonet of a British sentinel, the scar of which he bore through life. He volunteered at once as a private in the Continental Army and was assigned to the care of the wounded. He passed an examination before a medical board and received the appointment of senior surgeon to the hospital established at Cambridge, remaining on duty during the siege of Boston. With the transfer of the army to New York, the general hospital was moved to Long Island and Warren went there, May 11, 1776; then followed service in New Jersey and a narrow escape from capture following the battle of Trenton. He had a severe illness, applied for permission to return to Boston and was transferred to the General Hospital in the West End, in July, 1777, with the rank of senior surgeon, a position he filled until the close of the war. Then he settled in Boston as a practitioner.

The year 1780 saw a beginning of the Boston Medical Society. This organization which was made up of a group of the young physicians of the town, among whom Warren was a leading spirit, took an active part in promoting sound medical policies, made a fee table, and later mapped out a code of ethics. It was in this society that plans originated for a state medical society and for a medical school connected with Harvard. The club met at the Green Dragon Tavern and many a lively evening was spent in discussing ways and means. In the same year the American Academy of Arts and Sciences began its long career. To this society Dr. Warren, who became a member in August, 1781, contributed a paper in 1785 on a "Large Tumor of the Abdomen, Containing Hair." It was a case of dermoid cyst of the ovary which was opened by a median incision evacuating: "watery matter, pus, and a large quantity of short hair." The patient, one of the first upon whom an ovariectomy was done, made a good recovery, and the case excited much interest in the profession.

The Massachusetts Humane Society, an organization for assisting those apparently drowned and preventing drowning, came into existence in the year 1785. The first meeting of the trustees was held at Warren's house; he was the second president and a constant supporter of the society, which is in active operation today, as is the Society of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Warren's connection with the Massachusetts Medical Society is of considerable interest. He was a member of the Boston Medical Society when that organization was formed in 1780, before he was 27 years old. He seems to have been the energizing agent leading to the formation of the state society. His name appears among the fourteen petitioners for a charter in the bill filed in the Massachusetts House of Representatives in May, 1781; he was a constant attendant at the meetings of the society, was on many important committees, served as censor, councilor, corresponding secretary, vice president, gave the annual oration in 1805, and filled the presidential chair from 1804 until his death, the longest term of office



of any president, and at a time when the recently reorganized society needed a strong hand to guide it on its new path.

In the winter of 1780, Warren undertook to give a course of lectures on anatomy at the military hospital in Boston. His audience was composed of persons attached to the army in a medical capacity, a few medical students and some physicians of Boston, not a large gathering but one intensely interested in the practical dissections on the cadaver that had to be carried on with great secrecy on account of popular prejudice. The lectures were so much of a success that he was asked to repeat them. This he did, the course being attended by many literary and scientific men, including President Willard and members of the Harvard corporation, as well as by students from the college. A third course was given in Boston. It was in the winter of 1781, just after the first meeting of the state medical society, that Warren performed with success at the military hospital the operation of amputation at the shoulder joint.

Dr. Warren married in 1777 Miss Abigail Collins, daughter of John Collins, afterward Governor of Rhode Island. He had met her while she was visiting Colonel Mifflin's family in Cambridge. They had a happy married life of 37 years that was blessed by the birth of seventeen children. The eldest, the eminent John Collins, born in 1778, did the first operation under ether anæsthesia; and the youngest, Edward, born in 1804 was his father's biographer. Dr. Warren kept in close touch with his children; the letters he wrote to John Collins when John was a student of medicine at Edinburgh show strong affection, a broad outlook, and are delightful reading today.

As recording some of the many activities of this pioneer surgeon and organizer it is to be noted that in 1778 he formed a partnership with Isaac Rand and Lemuel Hayward to make a hospital at Sewall's Point, Brookline, for the inoculation for smallpox and the treatment of patients attacked by that dread disease. He volunteered as a private in the Rhode Island Campaign, returning to his hospital duties and to his family at its conclusion. The Corporation of Harvard College, impressed by Warren's efforts at teaching, voted in November, 1782, to establish a medical school with three professorships, on lines laid down by him. Warren was appointed to fill the chair of anatomy and surgery. His first lectures were given in Cambridge during the winter of 1783. He had a well modulated voice, an impressive manner, seldom used notes and held the attention of his students for periods as long as 2 hours. To reach Cambridge from his home in Boston was a long and tiring journey. It was not until 1810 that the school was moved to Boston and then the professor of anatomy and surgery had the assistance of his eldest son, who, at his request, had been made adjunct professor in 1809, thus lightening the teaching labors of a busy practitioner, for Warren was much in demand and surgery occupied a good deal of his attention. He was cool and deliberate in operating and did not omit details; although impulsive by nature

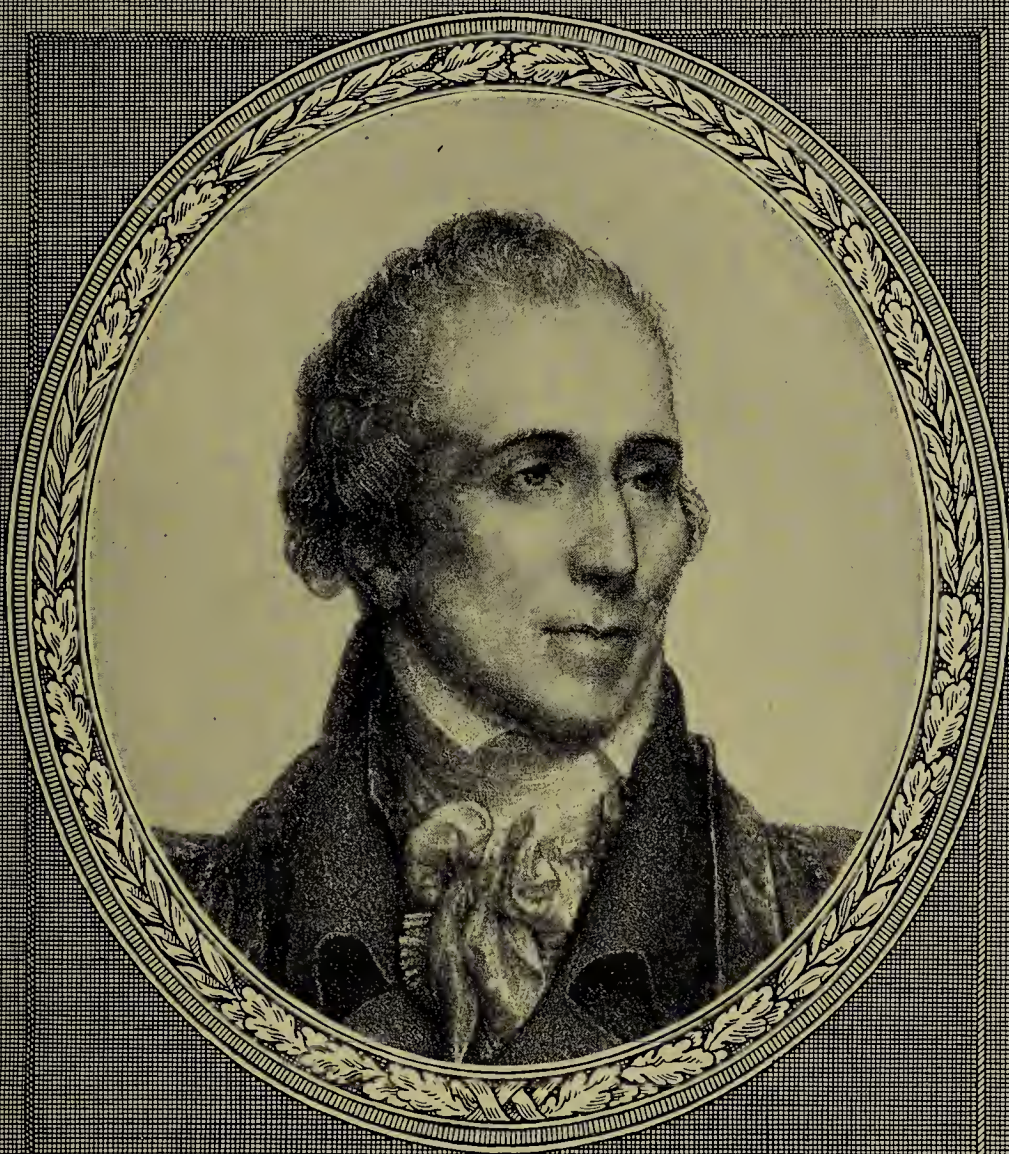
he held himself in control during the trying ordeals of operations on patients writhing with pain when there was no anæsthesia—difficult undertakings for a man with Warren's sensitive nature. John Collins Warren said that his father was a better surgeon than he. He praised the cataract operation his father did. Trained by an extensive practical experience in the army John Warren could afford to forego the study in European capitals that some of his contemporaries enjoyed and that he gave his son. At the time when the medical school had been started auspiciously Harvard conferred on him the honorary M.D. (1786), the only medical degree he held.

It was the custom in the period following the Revolution for practitioners of medicine to visit their patients on horseback, resorting to the use of a chaise only for long journeys. Dr. Warren observed the custom but rode and drove a bit recklessly, if we may believe his contemporaries. We may picture him dressed in the costume of the time, according to the biographical notes of his medical son: a colored coat, metal buttons, usually yellow; colored and figured waistcoat; short breeches, buttoning at the knees; long boots, with white tops and, when riding on horseback, a pair of leather breeches; a shirt, ruffled at the breast and about the wrists; a white cravat, filled in with what was called a pudding, and a cocked hat. After the year 1785 he lived in a large house on the north side of School street with stables, greenhouse, and outbuildings reaching as far as Washington street. In an office in a separate building students assisted with dressings and in the preparation and dispensing of medicines. The well furnished and ample mansion was a home and a place of entertainment for the important men and women of the time. His garden and fruit trees were a great interest and later, when he owned a small farm in Jamaica Plain, a near-by suburb, he was president of the Massachusetts Agricultural Society.

Dr. Warren's service as a practitioner brought him into contact with the extensive epidemics which prevailed in those days. He took a prominent part in the management of the yellow fever which visited Boston in 1798, and wrote a report on it. In 1808 he was one of a committee of the Massachusetts Medical Society to present a report of 50 pages on the smallpox that had broken out at Marblehead in 1801, the report being published in four newspapers of the town. His noteworthy contribution to medical literature was the annual oration before the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1805 entitled: "A View of the Mercurial Practice in Febrile Diseases," republished as a separate pamphlet of 187 pages in 1813, in which he advocated the use of mercury in many of the prevailing diseases of the period. Beyond an occasional contribution to the meetings of the state society and to the columns of the *New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery* he left few medical writings.

Space permits only a bare mention here of Warren's extramedical activities. He was chosen Grand Master of the Massachusetts Lodge of Free Masons in





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1782; he delivered the first Fourth of July oration in the Brattle Street church in 1783, this taking the place of the Fifth of March oration commemorative of the Boston Massacre. He was a member of the Massachusetts convention for ratifying the federal constitution in 1788, and he addressed the voters in Faneuil Hall in the same year in favor of a memorial to Congress asking that the treaty with Great Britain might be put into effect. In 1796 he delivered a eulogy of the Hon. Thomas Russell, a distinguished merchant of Boston. Although Warren took a practical interest in the affairs of the nation, as well as of the community in which he lived, the rules of his professorship in the medical school forbade his holding public office had his inclination turned that way or had his medical duties permitted.

The termination of the War of 1812 had been celebrated on Washington's Birthday in 1815 by a procession and, in the evening, by fireworks and by an illumination of the entire front of the statehouse, for the first time. Dr. Warren, who had been in failing health with angina, went through the streets to see the sights with his youngest son, then 11 years old. On going home he said to him: "Now let me depart in peace, for I have seen the salvation of my country." Next month he had a letter from his brother in Foxborough, 25 miles away, that he had dislocated his shoulder. Warren drove to him at once, made several attempts to reduce the dislocation; was up nearly all night, finally succeeded and returned to Boston to make his usual rounds to his patients. Not long after he had an attack of pneumonia and died, April 4, 1815, at the age of 61, leaving his widow and nine children. An autopsy showed extensive disease of the arch of the aorta and pleuritic adhesions of long standing. Mrs. Warren survived him until 1832, when she died at the age of seventy-three.







